

Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde



Happy New Year to all of you, our valued colleagues! We applaud you, not just for getting the essential work done in grand fashion through the tribulations of 2020, but also for your professionalism, discipline, and concern for others as we all continued distancing and limiting large group visits through the Thanksgiving and Christmas/New Year holidays.

Beyond the constant worry of illness, the personal isolation has been perhaps the most difficult thing about the COVID crisis for those unaffected by the virus itself. But we are proud of our staff members recognizing and sacrificing to do the right and accommodating thing for all the others with whom we come into contact from day to day. **By putting our own desires behind the needs of others, we truly demonstrate the "respect for people" promise that has become an important part of the CMS mantra for strategic planning and project implementation.**

We are all excited about the dawning of 2021, if nothing else, because we have worked through the rigors and trials of the past year together, and we are ready to turn the page, pursue our work, look after our families, and return to some sense of normalcy in this brand new year of fresh leadership and more positive outlooks.

With the rollout of **COVID-19 vaccines under way and planned over the months ahead**, we at CMS must continue to double down on safety and distancing needs during the transition as we await the news that vaccines are available for all State workers, especially those at particular risk. This will take time and additional patience. Now is not the time to let down our COVID defenses in any way, but we can rest with some real assurance that the end of this crisis is in sight if we can maintain our hope.

Meanwhile, looking back on an eventful year, **we are extremely proud of the important work accomplished by our dedicated CMS staff in every Bureau, office and program of our agency.** In many cases, productivity has improved as we have worked from home, and limited individual contact as much as possible. That has made it possible for those who must be in the office or on site to do so more safely without unnecessary contact with those who could work from home most effectively.

We have said it before, **but I am most appreciative of the willingness of our entire CMS staff to collaborate more effectively and simply not give in to any urge to let up on the accelerator, or stop doing the essential things we are here to do within CMS alone, and in our partnerships with other executive agencies.** Indeed, this time has allowed us to examine, evaluate, and improve internal processes in multiple areas of the agency.



We are making great strides in many areas, including **diversity and inclusion**, as we attempt to expand the pool of certified Business Enterprise Program vendors on State contracts, and as we better balance diversity and equity in all aspects of human resource management.

We are providing better service to those who rely on us for timely **property management**, especially as we prepare for final relocations and agency life outside Chicago's **James R. Thompson Center** in the months ahead.

We are finding ways to continue providing needed resources such as **reliable motor pool vehicles and meeting our agencies' surplus property disposition needs**, even as we reduce process glitches to improve invoice turnaround times and oversee day-to-day operations more effectively.

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Our **Strategic Sourcing** staff provided much needed procurement relief for beleaguered agencies from the beginning of the COVID crisis last March and is revamping processes that should improve turnaround times for contract purchases and streamline necessary oversight.

We are establishing a more accessible and timely **Administrative Hearings** process representing all Illinois agencies and constituents, and an improved case management capability that we think will become the envy of many other states, enhancing our analytical capabilities to improve service.

We have overhauled offerings from our **Bureau of Benefits** during recent years and the result is better service, improved benefit offerings, easier user access, and broader inclusion for employees and retirees of the State and their dependents.

Our **Office of Operational Excellence** continues to lead the way to bring more and more agency processes into the realm of Rapid Results improvements and is providing more effective and concise training and mentoring through virtual resources as a result of COVID. These efforts have, in many cases, resulted in simplified approaches to training, saving time and money as we go, without losing the essential learning and collaboration needed to make process improvements effective and lasting. The Rapid Results team's work in recent years is saving the State **more than \$20 million a year, every year, and is reallocating more than 800,000 labor hours every year** by eliminating much

wasted process time and unnecessary process steps through more effective management techniques.

And, of course, our **Human Resources** teams are improving processes, and speeding up cycle times on a variety of activities including an award-winning hiring process undertaking, more effective job development and training analysis, simplified HR transactions, and a better onboarding routine.

In short, I am excited by the strides we have taken in light of the crisis of 2020, and I am doubly excited as we at CMS together are making good on several changes we had planned in the way we do business in service to agency clients, and in the way we communicate and work together with the agencies that depend on us.

Make no mistake, none of this would work or probably even happen if our entire leadership team were not on the same page and moving in the same direction, or if our Bureau teams were not dedicated to doing the work required, the best it can possibly be done. **Our entire CMS team is to be commended for the work accomplished in 2020, despite the unprecedented challenges we have faced. I am extremely proud to serve alongside each of you.**

Happy 2021, indeed! And as my New Year "toast" for you: **Here is to our successes together, and to many, many more good years to come for all of us.**

Native American Employment Plan Council

The State of Illinois announced the new **Native American Employment Plan Advisory Council** in December 2020. The council was developed to increase employment and promotion opportunities for Native Americans in Illinois. The council held its first meeting on December 9, 2020 and will examine the prevalence and impact of Native Americans employed by State government and the barriers faced by Native Americans who seek employment or promotional opportunities in State government.

In August 2019, **Governor JB Pritzker** signed the **Native American Employment Plan Act**, establishing the 10-member Native American Employment Plan Advisory Council and proclaiming **November as Native American Heritage Month in Illinois**.

The following Native American community leaders and subject matter experts were appointed to the council to examine issues, barriers, and incentives regarding Native American access to State government:

- **Andrew Johnson** – DuPage County
- **Heather Miller** – Cook County
- **Matthew Beaudet** – Cook County
- **Pamela Silas** – Cook County
- **Nichole Boyd** – Champaign County
- **Susan Stanley** – Cook County
- **Peter Poirot** – Clinton County
- **Tim Blanks** – Cook County
- **Kim Vigue** – Cook County
- **Wendy White Eagle** – Kane County.

The Native American Employment Plan Advisory Council receives administrative support from CMS and will meet on a quarterly basis.

Illinois currently has the sixth largest Urban Indian population in the United States, with over 100 Tribal Nations, according to a University of Illinois at Chicago's Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy June 2019 report.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/yc6nrzq8> to read the full press announcement.



January 2021 Employee of the Month - Elisa Martinez



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CMS Data Analyst **Elisa Martinez** has been named the Exemplary Employee of the Month for January 2021 for her outstanding work in developing CMS Live Events and CMS University for employee training and access, along with tracking, analyzing, and shedding light on performance metrics in several areas of the agency.

"Elisa's work exemplifies the CMS strategic orientation toward a culture of quality, continuous improvement, and respect for people," said Patrick Nolan, CMS Chief of Data Analytics, who supervises Martinez and outlined the nomination. **"Her work this year can be grouped into three basic categories: data-driven analysis, process improvement, and an emphasis on the people that make the State run."**

Martinez describes her work as a labor of love. **"This is an amazing surprise and such an honor for me,"** Martinez said. "I love working with the teams at CMS and contributing where I can. People here care, and that context matters to me. They've all been super-supportive of me, and everyone I work with here seems to embrace the idea of respect for people."

In data-driven analysis, Elisa is credited with "executing two ground-breaking pieces of work," said Nolan, including **detailed analysis of the procurement cycle time for Strategic Sourcing** to determine which processes consume the most time and which types of contracts

represent the highest potential for cost- and time-saving consolidation. She also did a "deep dive" into **odometer data generated by the Division of Vehicles' motor pool that helped reduce the DOV error rate from 75 percent to 20 percent while determining insights into where staff vehicles are needed most.** She did it by creating a sophisticated index showing vehicle-usage distributions by agency. "Very complex stuff, but it comes pretty naturally to Elisa," Nolan said.

In process improvement, Martinez has assisted **Administrative Hearings in procuring and establishing its new case management system software and has helped create Sharepoint sites that have automated significant amounts of work in both Property Management and Strategic Sourcing,** Nolan said. "This work is reducing State work hours, increasing collaboration, and providing consistent technological solutions for solid performance analysis."

Nolan says few employees can "read a room" and motivate team members better than Martinez. "Nowhere is this more apparent than in her work elevating the State's workforce through training, equity and inclusion, and engagement assessment," he said. She has worked through these issues individually by Bureau at times, and she has done so by developing and administering the annual **Statewide Employee Survey**, which goes out to gauge attitudes of more than 45,000 State employees each year.

Martinez credits Deputy Director of Operational Excellence **John Baranzelli**, early in her tenure at CMS, with helping her understand the importance and complexities of public-sector management when she first became involved with Rapid Results and process analysis during a stint as a **Dunn Fellow** in the **Office of the Governor**. "I think getting to work with John and the Rapid Results team early in my time with the State really instilled a better understanding of the importance of government operations," she said. "There are a lot of layers and some really big repercussions if you (unwittingly) incentivize inefficient behaviors. But mostly I came to realize the idea of continuous improvement and respect for people embody a logical and consistent approach to improving operations."

Martinez also is noted for her charm in keeping things light around the office and for helping organize **social events for staff online to help maintain connections during COVID distancing and stay-at-home orders.** She is known as "a generous baker" around the James R. Thompson Center, Nolan said. "Clearly, Elisa is a great asset on many levels at CMS."

Safety Corner - COVID-19 Vaccine Information



Following several review processes and approval by the US Federal Drug Administration (FDA), **the first doses of a COVID-19 vaccine were shipped out for nationwide distribution in December.** This is an important milestone in our fight against COVID-19. The COVID-19 vaccine is a critical tool to help us suppress the spread of the virus and safely reopen the State.

Medical experts in Illinois and other states across the country have worked since the summer to develop vaccine distribution plans that prioritize distribution to the most vulnerable residents and ensure a quick, equitable and transparent process.

According to [Illinois' COVID-19 Vaccine Plan](#), **frontline healthcare workers and people in long term healthcare facilities will have access to the vaccine first.** As distribution begins, we will receive more guidance on how to access the vaccine and the additional planned phases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—an esteemed group of public health experts and medical professionals—develops recommendations on how to use vaccines to control disease in the United States. **Here are 8 facts about the plans to distribute the vaccine in the United States from the CDC.**

- **The safety of COVID-19 vaccines is a top priority.** The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. Learn how federal partners are working together to [ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines](#).
- **Many vaccines are being developed and tested, but some might be ready before others**—CDC is planning for many possibilities. CDC is working with partners at all levels, including healthcare associations, on flexible COVID-19 vaccination programs that can accommodate different vaccines and scenarios.
- **At least at first, COVID-19 vaccines might be used under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and**

Drug Administration (FDA). Learn more about [Emergency Use Authorization](#) and watch a [video on what an EUA is](#).

- **There will be a limited supply of COVID-19 vaccines initially, but supply will continually increase.** The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as large quantities are available. The plan is to have several thousand vaccination providers available, including doctors' offices, retail pharmacies, hospitals, and federally qualified health centers.
- **Because of limited supply, some groups will be recommended to get a COVID-19 vaccine first.** Healthcare personnel and long-term care facility residents should be offered COVID-19 vaccination in the initial phase of the U.S. COVID-19 vaccination program while there is limited vaccine supply.
- **At first, COVID-19 vaccines may not be recommended for children.** In early [clinical trials](#) for various COVID-19 vaccines, only non-pregnant adults participated. However, clinical trials continue to expand those recruited to participate. The groups recommended to receive the vaccines could change in the future.
- **Cost will not be an obstacle to getting vaccinated against COVID-19.** Vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost.
- **COVID-19 vaccine planning is being updated as new information becomes available.**
- Visit the [CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine](#) page for updates.



Benefit Corner - Be Well Illinois



The State of Illinois' new and improved wellness program, **Be Well Illinois**, is now live! 2020 has transformed our lives in many ways so we developed **Be Well Illinois**, in an effort to update our approach to workplace wellbeing while supporting your comprehensive wellness goals. **Be Well Illinois is designed to not only focus on supporting your physical health but also your mental, financial, and social wellbeing.**

Be Well Illinois is tailored to directly address the comprehensive health and wellness needs of State employees by connecting you to resources from health plan carriers to help you be well and stay well.

At the end of 2020, CMS employees got a sneak peak at the new wellness program and more than 120 state employees participated in the **Be Well 21 Days to 2021 Challenge**. Each day, challenge participants completed a new task to help them get more active, plan their comprehensive wellness goals, get more sleep and spend quality time with their loved ones in preparation for the new year.

Stay tuned for more Be Well Illinois sponsored events and challenges including a 5K in 2021. Visit the [Be Well Illinois website](https://www2.illinois.gov/cms/events/SitePages/List.aspx) to access resources for monthly health awareness causes, wellness webinars, financial and physical wellness tips, recipes for healthy eating and more. Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bewellillinois for the latest news from our partners, special wellness challenges and chances to win exclusive Be Well swag.

Events Corner

Fair Access to Justice



CMS Deputy Director Rebecca Roussell, Kimberly Jones Merchant from the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, CMS Deputy Director Katy Straub and CMS Director Janel Forde during the Racial Equity, Opportunity and Strengthening our Communities webinar.



On December 7, 2020, the CMS Bureaus of Diversity and Inclusion and Administrative Hearings hosted the Fair Access to Justice: Racial Equity, Opportunity and Strengthening our Communities session with **Kimberly Jones Merchant**, Director of the Racial Justice Institute and Network at the **Shriver Center on Poverty Law**. The session included a rich dialogue about race, equity and community which will be continued in future session.

If you missed this session or would like to revisit this conversation, please [click here](#) to access the session recording.

JLL - Achieving Ambitions Through Our Diversity and Inclusion



CMS Public Affairs Specialist Ivan Ramirez, CMS BEP Associate Deputy Director Nicole Mandeville, CMS Deputy Director Rebecca Roussell, Terry McGuffrage from JLL Chicago and Angela ShumPERT from RBJ Properties.

On December 17, 2020, CMS hosted the Achieving Ambitions Through Our Diversity and Inclusion webinar with **JLL Chicago** and **RJB Properties**. This webinar is the first in a series of industry specific sessions developed by the CMS **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** to share insights about diversity, inclusion, supplier diversity and doing business with the State of Illinois.

Visit <https://www2.illinois.gov/cms/events/SitePages/List.aspx> for upcoming BEP webinars and events.



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